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Report of the High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for Statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2017/228 and past practices, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for Statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The report provides a summary of the activities of the High-level Group since the forty-eighth session of the Statistical Commission. It highlights the outcomes of the Group's ninth meeting, held on 7 and 8 November 2017. It describes the ongoing work related to the implementation of the Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data and the work on statistical capacity needs by the joint subgroup of the High-level Group and the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators. It also provides an update on the preparations for the second United Nations World Data Forum, to be held from 22 to 24 October 2018 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, and explores the issues around the possible creation of the position of Chief Statistician of the United Nations.

Points for discussion by the Commission include: (a) approving the proposed revision to the terms of reference of the joint subgroup; (b) reviewing and expressing its views on the idea of creating the position of Chief Statistician of the United Nations; (c) expressing its views on the mechanism for contributions by the Commission to the high-level political forum on sustainable development; and (d) expressing its views on and approving the proposed work plan of the High-level Group for 2018.

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Report of the High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for Statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

I. Introduction

1. The High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for Statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was established at the forty-sixth session of the Statistical Commission. It is composed of representatives from 22 national statistical offices and operates under the auspices of the Statistical Commission. In its decision 46/101,[1] the Commission tasked the High-level Group with providing strategic leadership for the implementation process relating to the Sustainable Development Goals as it concerns statistical monitoring and reporting and fostering statistical capacity-building, partnership and coordination.

II. Membership

2. Based on the terms of reference of the High-level Group, in the third quarter of 2017, there was a rotation of members of both the High-level Group and the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators, coordinated through the respective regional mechanisms in each region. In line with the terms of reference and practices of the High-level Group, members are expected to represent the countries in their own subregion. In order to facilitate this representation, States that are members of the High-level Group should have regular consultations on the work of the Group with their neighbouring countries.

3. Through the 2017 rotation, the following nine new members were newly included in the High-level Group: Angola and Senegal, nominated by the Statistical Commission for Africa; Iraq and Morocco, nominated by the Statistical Committee of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia; Myanmar and Sri Lanka, nominated by the Committee on Statistics of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific; and Costa Rica, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Suriname, nominated by the Statistical Conference of the Americas. There were no changes in the representation proposed by the Conference of European Statisticians or by the Conference of the Americas for the subregion of South America. See annex I for the current full membership of the High-level Group.

4. At the ninth meeting of the High-level Group, the Director of Statistics of the Haut-Commissariat au Plan in Morocco, Belkacem Abdous, was elected Co-Chair of the Group, joining the Chief Statistician of Hungary, Gabriella Vukovich. Mr. Abdous serves in the High-level Group as a representative from the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia region.

III. Ninth meeting of the High-level Group, 7 and 8 November 2017, Ramallah, State of Palestine

5. The ninth meeting of the High-level Group was hosted by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics in Ramallah on 7 and 8 November 2017. The main topics on the

[1] See E/2015/24-E/CN.3/2015/40.

agenda were the implementation guide for the Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data, capacity development, including immediate needs for statistical capacity-building, and preparations for the second United Nations World Data Forum and the High-level Group's involvement therein. The Group also discussed some aspects of the implementation of General Assembly resolution 71/313 in relation to the Cape Town Global Action Plan, in which the Assembly stressed the need for the Statistical Commission to inform the discussions at the high-level political forum on statistical gaps and capacity-building needs in relation to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, and the need for countries, the United Nations and all other entities to intensify support for statistical capacity-building. In addition, the High-level Group further reviewed and discussed issues around the possible creation of the position of Chief Statistician of the United Nations and issues related to open data.

IV. Notes on the implementation of the Cape Town Global Action Plan

6. Between July and October 2017, a subgroup of the High-level Group (Denmark, Ecuador, Hungary, Mongolia and State of Palestine, as well as the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (PARIS21), as an invited issue partner) developed an outline of the notes on the implementation for the Cape Town Global Action Plan (see annex II). The notes on the implementation are based on national practices related to the six strategic areas of the Cape Town Global Action Plan. It is the intention of the subgroup to collect experiences and cases from other countries not represented in the High-level Group through an open consultation. The High-level Group determined that the implementation of the plan should also be reviewed at the United Nations World Data Forum in 2018, emphasizing the need for implementation to take place at the country level.

V. Joint subgroup of the High-level Group and the Inter-Agency and Expert Group

A. Background

7. At its forty-seventh session, the Statistical Commission endorsed the proposal to establish a joint subgroup of the High-level Group and the Inter-Agency and Expert Group, tasked with developing a plan to address the immediate priorities, including statistical capacity-building and the financial framework for the implementation of the global indicators for the Sustainable Development Goals.

8. The joint subgroup held a meeting on the margins of the forty-eighth session of the Statistical Commission to discuss regional work undertaken on determining capacity-building needs, a paper on criteria for capacity-building and a workplan. It was decided that the work of the joint subgroup should be more directly linked to the Cape Town Global Action Plan.

B. Joint questionnaire on capacity development and immediate needs

9. In accordance with its terms of reference, the joint subgroup has been working toward identifying recommendations on priority areas towards which to target

funding for statistical capacity-building and advocate for resource mobilization, management and monitoring. At the ninth meeting of the High-level Group, a draft paper, which more closely links capacity-building needs to sustainable development and the Cape Town Global Action Plan, and aims to identify national priorities, was presented by the joint subgroup. It included a proposal on a questionnaire aimed at identifying immediate needs and areas where national statistical capacity needs to be strengthened.

10. The Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century also presented plans to the High-level Group for a survey on capacity development. It was agreed that there should be only one survey and that the joint subgroup would work with the Partnership to develop a joint questionnaire on capacity development and the immediate needs for statistical capacity-building.

11. After inputs from the High-level Group were incorporated into the questionnaire, the survey was rolled out to national statistical offices in December 2017. The initial results will be analysed in January 2018 and transmitted to the Commission in a background document.

C. Financial framework

12. As stated in the joint subgroup's terms of reference, the subgroup was also tasked with developing a plan to address the financial framework for the implementation of the global indicators for the Sustainable Development Goals. At its ninth meeting, the joint subgroup presented suggestions related to financing for capacity-building. Many of the actions set out in the Cape Town Global Action Plan will require additional funding. Developing countries, and in particular the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, will require additional contributions and technical support for capacity development. The High-level Group agreed that it is important to address the funding needs related to the implementation of the Global Action Plan so as to ensure that its implementation is as successful as possible.

13. The High-level Group supported framing the fund profile in the context of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. The Group could potentially play an advisory role or provide high-level steering. The Group could also focus on identifying areas that are underfunded and those where multiple initiatives are taking place, in order to recommend a more efficient utilization of resources.

14. The High-level Group agreed that the joint subgroup, in consultation with the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat, would explore possible different solutions for a financing mechanism to address the capacity-building needs relating to the implementation of the Cape Town Global Action Plan and the national needs and develop a position paper. The paper will be submitted to the Commission in a background document.

D. Updated mandate of the joint subgroup

15. At the ninth meeting of the High-level Group, it was agreed that the mandate of the joint subgroup would be updated. The High-level Group agreed that the joint subgroup will work on achieving a better understanding of a possible mechanism for financing for the implementation of the Cape Town Global Action Plan, and develop

a position paper. See annex III for the proposed revised terms of reference of the joint subgroup for discussion and approval by the Commission.

VI. United Nations World Data Forum, 2018

A. Preparation for the second Forum

16. The second United Nations World Data Forum will take place from 22 to 24 October 2018 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. A Programme Committee was formed in July 2017, consisting of 23 members, including the two Co-Chairs of the High-level Group and a third member of the Group, the State of Palestine. The list of Programme Committee members for the second United Nations World Data Forum can be found on the Forum's website.[2]

17. The Programme Committee has elaborated on the six original thematic areas[3] used to guide the development of the programme.

18. In order to ensure a wide range of inputs from all key stakeholders, the secretariat issued an open call for session proposals, which was developed by the Programme Committee on 1 November 2017 through an electronic platform for submission available on the website of the Forum. The call is open until 31 January 2018. In addition, a separate call for posters and individual interventions and one for contributions to the exhibition will be issued in the coming months.

19. The Programme Committee and the secretariat are also developing a set of selection criteria to assess the session proposals and to guide the decision process. Throughout the process, the Programme Committee or the High-level Group may request revisions to some proposals. All applicants will be informed about the status of their applications by 31 March 2018. The proposed programme will be reviewed by the High-level Group.

B. Process for decisions on the host country for the third United Nations World Data Forum

20. The third United Nations World Data Forum will take place in the fourth quarter of 2020. The High-level Group agreed that there would be a rotation among the regions for the hosting of the Forum. The timeline for expressing interest and submitting bids to host the third United Nations World Data Forum is as follows:

(a) The call for expressions of interest will be sent to the Permanent Missions to the United Nations in New York by the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs in January 2018, with a deadline for reply of 31 March 2018;

(b) Detailed bids to host the third Forum are to be submitted and received by 31 August 2018;

(c) The decision will be taken by the High-level Group on 21 October 2018, on the margins of the second Forum.

[2] See https://undataforum.org.

[3] See https://undataforum.org/WorldDataForum/programme/.

VII. Chief Statistician of the United Nations

21. At the forty-eighth session of the Statistical Commission, in its decision 48/117,[4] the Commission took note of the recommendation of the Office of Internal Oversight Services that it explore the possibility of designating a senior official as Chief Statistician of the United Nations to coordinate statistical matters across United Nations entities. The Commission also agreed that this topic should be discussed further by the High-level Group.

22. Based on the recommendation of the Office of Internal Oversight Services and the decision of Commission, the High-level Group agreed, at its ninth meeting, to review the arrangements concerning chief statisticians in other agencies and entities and to explore possible options for the creation of the position of Chief Statistician of the United Nations. At the same meeting, the Group also decided to establish a subgroup to examine the issues surrounding the creation of the position of Chief Statistician. The following members are part of the subgroup: Switzerland (as lead), Argentina, Italy, Suriname and the State of Palestine.

23. A paper by the High-level Group on the creation of the position of Chief Statistician is transmitted to the Commission in a background document.

VIII. Strengthening the link between the Statistical Commission and the high-level political forum

24. At its ninth meeting, the High-level Group reviewed some of the elements contained in General Assembly resolution 71/313, including the need for the Statistical Commission to inform the discussions at the high-level political forum on sustainable development regarding statistical gaps and capacity-building needs related to the Sustainable Development Goals.

25. At the high-level political forum, every year in July, Member States come together to discuss the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Through the voluntary national reviews, Member States report on the follow-up to and review of the Agenda. During the forum in 2016 and 2017, there was minimal involvement of the Statistical Commission and statisticians in the official programme of the forum, with only one brief session including a panel of statisticians featured in the programme of the forum for both years. The High-level Group agreed that it was essential that the national statistical offices and the global statistical community be represented more extensively in the official programme of the forum. To that end, the Group recommends that the programme for the forum should include one or more sessions fully dedicated to data and statistics and to the needs for capacity-building.

IX. Workplan for 2018

26. At its ninth meeting, in November 2017, the High-level Group agreed upon a workplan for 2018, which is contained in annex IV.

[4] See E/2017/24-E/CN.3/2017/35.

X. Points for decision

27. **The Statistical Commission is invited to:**

(a) **Approve the proposed revision to the terms of reference of the joint subgroup, as contained in annex III;**

(b) **Review and express its views on the idea of creating the position of Chief Statistician of the United Nations;**

(c) **Express its views on the mechanism for contributions by the Commission to the high-level political forum on sustainable development;**

(d) **Express its views on and approve the proposed workplan of the High-level Group for 2018.**

Annex I

Current membership of the High-level Group

The following countries are members of the High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as of November 2017:

Statistical Commission for Africa: Angola, Rwanda, Senegal and South Africa
Statistical Committee of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia: Iraq, Morocco and State of Palestine
Committee on Statistics, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific: Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Vanuatu
Statistical Conference of the Americas: Argentina, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Suriname
Conference of European Statisticians: Denmark, Hungary, Italy, Switzerland and the United States of America
Chair of Statistical Commission:[1] Brazil

[1] The Chair of the Statistical Commission is an ex officio member of the High-level Group.

Annex II

Notes on the implementation of the Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data

Draft outline (as at 27 June 2017)

I. Introduction

- A. Background on the High-level Group and Cape Town Global Action Plan
- B. Setting the stage
  - 1. Purpose
  - 2. Resolution
  - 3. Audience (players/responsible entities)

II. Interlinkages across different strategic areas of the Cape Town Global Action Plan

III. Implementation and coordination of capacity-building activities

- A. Implementation of the Cape Town Global Action Plan at different levels
  - 1. Global
  - 2. Regional
  - 3. Subregional
  - 4. National
  - 5. Subnational
- B. Coordination across the levels
- C. Coherence and consistency across multilateral and bilateral activities
- D. Financing: key principles of the financing of capacity development
  - 1. Resource mobilization both within the global community to carry out the Cape Town Global Action Plan and with a focus on domestic funding
  - 2. Domestic funding (including advocacy activities and policy dialogue)
  - 3. Advocacy

IV. Implementation of the Cape Town Global Action Plan

(with reference to countries in vulnerable situations)

1. Strategic area 1: coordination and strategic leadership on data for sustainable development
   - (a) Best practices and good examples of implementation and coordination
   - (b) Challenges faced in the implementation
2. Strategic area 2: innovation and modernization of national statistical systems

(a) Best practices and good examples of implementation and coordination

(b) Challenges faced in the implementation

3. Strategic area 3: strengthening of basic statistical activities and programmes, with particular focus on addressing the monitoring needs for the 2030 Agenda

(a) Best practices and good examples of implementation and coordination

(b) Challenges faced in the implementation

4. Strategic area 4: dissemination and use of sustainable development data

(a) Best practices and good examples of implementation and coordination

(b) Challenges faced in the implementation

5. Strategic area 5: multi-stakeholder partnerships for sustainable development data

(a) Best practices and good examples of implementation and coordination

(b) Challenges faced in the implementation

6. Strategic area 6: mobilize resources and coordinate efforts for statistical capacity-building

(a) Best practices and good examples of implementation and coordination

(b) Challenges faced in the implementation

Annex III

Terms of reference for the joint subgroup of the High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for Statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators

1. Background

At its forty-seventh session, the Statistical Commission endorsed the proposal to establish a joint subgroup of the High-level Group and the Inter-Agency and Expert Group. The joint subgroup was tasked with developing a plan to address the immediate priorities, including statistical capacity-building and a financial framework for the implementation of the global indicators for the Sustainable Development Goals. The creation of the joint subgroup emerged from discussions on the need for a more coordinated effort by both the High-level Group and the Inter-Agency and Expert Group to ensure that appropriate actions are taken to support national statistical systems in the implementation of the global indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals.

2. Objective

The joint subgroup will continue to be the venue for linking the work of the High-level Group and the Inter-Agency and Expert Group. In particular, it will plan for a process for the High-level Group to obtain from the Inter-Agency and Expert Group, in an efficient manner, information on the development of the Sustainable Development Goal indicators and the gaps in data availability to inform the decisions and actions of the High-level Group in the most efficient possible way.

The national statistical systems have a pivotal role in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goal indicators. Their role as the gatekeeper of data traffic flows needs to be strengthened and reinforced through the recommendations of the joint subgroup. The recommendations of the subgroup are advisory, aiming at ensuring harmonization between the work of the High-level Group and Inter-Agency and Expert Group.

The Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data, adopted by the Statistical Commission at its forty-eighth session in March 2017, provides a framework for the design and implementation of country-led statistical capacity-building activities that are necessary for achieving the 2030 Agenda. The work of the joint subgroup is expected to contribute to the notes on implementation that are being developed by the High-level Group.

3. Membership

The joint subgroup will be composed of five members from the High-level Group and five members from the Inter-Agency and Expert Group, taking into account the appropriate regional representation and including the Co-Chairs of each group.

The membership was decided as follows:

Inter-Agency and Expert Group: Canada, Colombia and Egypt; Co-Chairs, Mexico and the United Republic of Tanzania

High-level Group: Denmark, Italy and the State of Palestine; Co-Chairs, Hungary and Morocco.

4. Organization of work

The joint subgroup will report to the High-level Group and the Inter-Agency and Expert Group. The joint subgroup is a country-led undertaking mandated by the Statistical Commission.

The joint subgroup will conduct its activities through electronic means. When possible, and in connection with other meetings or global events, the joint subgroup could meet to further discuss progress made and new issues that emerge during the year.

The outputs of the work of the joint subgroup, including the identification of top priorities and results and recommendations, will be summarized and circulated to the High-level Group and the Inter-Agency and Expert Group. Both groups will then share the recommendations on their respective websites.

The Statistics Division will act as secretariat of the joint subgroup.

5. Time frame

As the work on the identification of the immediate priorities for statistical capacity-building and the development of the financial framework in the context of the implementation of the global indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and the Cape Town Global Action Plan is ongoing, the joint subgroup will continue its workplan for two years, until the fifty-first session of the Statistical Commission.

Annex IV

Proposed workplan of the High-level Group for 2018

1. Meetings

   Tenth meeting, 4 March 2018 (prior to the forty-ninth session of the Statistical Commission)

   (a) Review the implementation guide

   (b) Follow-up on the joint subgroup

   (c) Update on the progress of preparations for the second United Nations World Data Forum

   Eleventh meeting, May-June 2018 (Morocco, tbc)

   (a) 2-day meeting with a comprehensive agenda, including the implementation of the Cape Town Global Action Plan

   (b) Review of the document on the financing and implementation of the Cape Town Global Action Plan

   (c) Review of the discussions on creating a position of Chief Statistician of the United Nations

   (d) Outcome document of the High-level Group (or broader stakeholders' engagement) to be presented at the second United Nations World Data Forum

   Twelfth meeting, 21 and 25 October 2018 (on the margins of the second United Nations World Data Forum, Dubai)

   (a) 21 October: final review of countries' bids for hosting the third Forum and decision on the host country for the third United Nations World Data Forum, in 2020

   (b) 25 October: key partners of the Programme Committee to participate in the initial assessment of the second Forum and discussion on lessons learned

2. Further activities on the Cape Town Global Action Plan

   (a) Finalize the implementation guide

   (b) Joint subgroup and Statistics Division development of notes and guidance on capacity-building and financing aspects

3. United Nations World Data Forum: 22–24 October 2018, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

4. Other events

   (a) March 2018: Side events of the forty-ninth session of the Statistical Commission

   (b) March 2018: forty-ninth session of the Statistical Commission

   (c) July 2018: high-level political forum on sustainable development

(d) September 2018: General Assembly side event to provide an update on the implementation of the Cape Town Global Action Plan and the notes on implementation